

A SURVEY OF THE SALTATORIA OF THE BRISTOL AREA AND NORTH SOMERSET

BY J. F. BURTON, F.R.E.S. F.Z.S.*

(Continued from page 80)

Grey Bush-cricket *Platycleis denticulata* (Panz.)

This fully winged, grey-brown coastal Tettigoniid is very local indeed in this area, but in spite of its largish size has probably been much overlooked. In fact, there were no recent reports of its occurrence until 2nd September 1977 when Mr. R.S. Cropper (Miller, 1979) discovered a flourishing colony on the southern slopes of Brean Down and established the first record of the species for the North Somerset vice-county (V.C.6). There are several other suitable habitats along the Somerset coast and a search of these may well reveal its presence. Sand Point is one such likely place which I must confess to never having found time to visit. However, I have looked for it along the foot of south-facing cliffs at Clevedon without success.

Some years ago I discovered two female Grey Bush-crickets labelled "Bristol" in the C. Bartlett collection in the Bristol City Museum which were evidently collected early this century. I suspect that these were obtained somewhere along the north side of the Avon Gorge, but so far my searches there have been unsuccessful.

Bog Bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* (L.)

The Bog Bush-cricket is another extremely local species in this area which ought to be more widespread and has probably been overlooked. The late Mr. J. Cowley (1949) discovered it in the Charity Field on Street Heath in the Somerset Peat Moors in August 1945 and recorded it there again in the two following years, and also in 1949. In 1954 (*pers. comm.*) he also discovered a colony on Westhay Moor, not very far away, which was still flourishing in August, 1957. Then, in late July 1965, while on a visit to the then newly established nature reserve of the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation on Westhay Moor, I found a very strong colony (mostly the brown form); possibly the same one that Cowley knew. This colony was in good shape when I paid a further visit to the reserve in 1976. It is interesting to note that *Conocephalus dorsalis* is common in the same place.

On the Mendips I have looked for *brachyptera* in vain on the bogs at Blackdown and Priddy.

Short-winged Conehead *Conocephalus dorsalis* (Latreille)

Marshy country is the haunt of this engaging, extremely agile, shiny emerald-green little bush-cricket and since Somerset is well

* 11, Rockside Drive, Henleaze, Bristol, BS9 4NW.

endowed with such country it is commoner there than in most English counties. In fact it is abundant in many parts of the peat moors, levels and coastal salt-marshes of Somerset.

Near Bristol *dorsalis* occurs in plenty on Walton and Weston Moors in the Gordano Valley where I have noted it between 1970 and 1975. One of its sites forms part of the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation's reserve on Weston Moor. I have also recorded a fairly strong population on the *Spartina* saltings of Clevedon Pill in most years between 1973 and 1976 inclusive, though part of its habitat there has recently been destroyed by the dumping of soil excavated in connection with the construction of the new sluice. It was first found there in July 1952. In August, 1949 the late J. Cowley (1963, *in litt.*) noted the presence of *dorsalis* on the salt-marsh at Berrow, but I have not yet visited this locality at the right time of the year to confirm its continued survival. However, in September, 1979 Mr. Richard Savage (*in litt.*) reported it as very common at Bridgwater Bay.

On 15th October 1962 a BBC colleague brought me a live male which she found in her garden in Stoke Bishop, Bristol — apparently the first record of this species in the West Gloucestershire vice-county. She caught a second specimen a day or two later, but it escaped.

In the Central Somerset Peat Moors I have records of it from the following localities: Sedge Drove, Edington, 1950 (J. Cowley); Catcott Heath, 1947 and 1950 (J. Cowley *et al.*), 1979 (R. Savage); Shapwick Heath, 1952 (J. Cowley), 1963 (J. F. Burton); Meare Heath, 1963 — 65 (J. F. Burton); Oxenpill, near Meare, 1964 (J. F. Burton); Westhay Moor, 1954 (J. Cowley), 1965 — on the S.T.N.C.'s reserve (J. F. Burton); Street Heath, 1948 (J. Cowley); and Walton Heath, 1948 (E. G. Neal), 1955 (J. Cowley).

I have several times found the rare fully winged form (f. *burri* Ebner) on Meare Heath.

Speckled Bush-cricket *Leptophyes punctatissima* (Bosc)

Of all the British bush-crickets, this green medium-sized, wingless species is the one that probably most often comes under the notice of the average person since it often inhabits herbaceous borders in gardens, even those of town suburbs. I frequently found them on Dwarf Michaelmas Daisies, Wild Raspberry, Canterbury Bells and Stinging Nettles in my garden when I lived at Pill (Burton, 1964, 1965) and subsequently at Clevedon, but not so far in the Bristol suburb of Henleaze where I have been living since 1977. Incidentally, Payne (1957) stated that he had received a number of records of Speckled Bush-crickets in gardens in the London area in which Michaelmas Daisies and Lupins were mentioned.

As elsewhere in southern England, *punctatissima* appears to be widely distributed and common in this area, especially on nettles, Wild Hop, brambles, and such hedgerow vegetation. On Church Hill, Clevedon I found a specimen on St. John's Wort in 1971. I have records of it from the following localities (my observations unless

SURVEY OF THE SALTATORIA OF THE BRISTOL AREA & N. SOMERSET

otherwise stated): Batheaston (Blathwayt, 1906); Edington 1945 - 48 (J. Cowley); Great Breach Wood, near Compton Dundon, 1971; Brown's Folly, Bathford, 1971; Clevedon (several places, including the seafront and gardens in the town, and on Court, Church and Wain's Hills), 1971 - 76; Pill, 1962 - 67; Leigh Woods, 1976 - 78; Clifton and Durdham Downs, Bristol, 1963 - 77 and Henleaze, Bristol, 1977.

In his recent paper on the invertebrates of Steep Holm, A. J. Parsons (1978) reported that he found *punctatissima* "moderately common and widespread" and, as with *Pholidoptera griseoptera*, believed that this was the first published record of the species on this island in the Bristol Channel. In fact, the late J. Cowley found a nymph there on 10th June, 1956. Incidentally, the species has also been recorded in the Bristol Channel from Lundy Island (Kevan, 1961; Ragge, 1965).

CRICKETS (Family Gryllidae).

House-cricket *Acheta domesticus* (L.)

Although not a native species, the House-cricket has long been naturalised in Britain and is the only cricket known to occur in the area covered by this paper. It is much less frequently reported than formerly because of improved hygiene. I have only encountered it at the Ashton Court Country Club, near Failand in North Somerset, where it used to be quite plentiful in the walls surrounding the indoor heated swimming pool from 1963 to 1970 and may still be there, but I have not visited this building since; and also in piles of excavated earth near the new sewage outfall works on the seawall just south of Clevedon in May, 1976.

Also in North Somerset, the late J. Cowley (*in litt.*) recorded *domesticus* "in numbers" in a smouldering rubbish dump between Midford and Monkton Combe in July, 1950 and invading houses near a rubbish dump at Street in July, 1953. The House-cricket can usually only live out-of-doors in this country in rubbish dumps. In the early 1950s there was a serious infestation of House-crickets in refuse in Feeder Road, Bristol.

As well as his records referred to above, J. Cowley heard one singing behind his Aga cooker in his house, Holywell House, Edington, near Bridgwater, on 22nd September, 1949, but did not hear any others there during his residence from 1941 to 1963 (J. Cowley, 1963 *in litt.*).

Blathwayt (1906) recorded *Acheta domesticus* from Batheaston.

GRASSHOPPERS (Family Acrididae)

Large Marsh Grasshopper *Stethophyma grossum* (L.)

This magnificent and beautiful grasshopper, the largest of the native British Acridids, was not apparently noticed in its Somerset haunts until 23rd August, 1942 when Dr. G. A. Walton took a single last instar nymph in a peat bog near Shapwick (Walton, 1944).

The late J. Cowley (1949) subsequently discovered it in abundance in 1947 on Catcott Heath and Street Heath, not far from Shapwick, but failed to find it in apparently suitable habitat on Edington Moor, near his home. Each year, up to and including 1949, however, he noted (Cowley, 1963 *pers. comm.*) its continued presence on Street Heath: "in rough areas between peat cuttings" (Map ref. ST460397) and in the Charity Field (ST464394), a disused area of peat pools with a flora which included Bog Myrtle, Bog Asphodel, Fine-leaved Heath and Cross-leaved Heath. Cowley also refound it on Catcott Heath in 1950 and again in 1958. His precise localities were a "wet hay meadow" (map ref. ST398406), "a nine-acre neglected fen" (ST405414) and "wet rushy pasture" (ST408412).

In 1950, with D. G. Brown and J. H. P. Sankey, he discovered *grossum* at the west end of Shapwick Heath, mostly north of Canada Drove in an area of rough grazing with open Bog Myrtle (ST408410), and noted its continued presence there in 1952. In 1963, I also found it to be quite common at the western end of Shapwick Heath amongst Bog Myrtle on a rather dry area of bog on the east side of the road from Shapwick to Westhay. Unfortunately, as I noted at the time (Burton, 1964), its habitat here was being invaded by Alder carr and in recent years I have failed to re-find it.

To the north-east of Shapwick Heath I discovered *grossum* in considerable numbers on Meare Heath in September, 1963 and to the east a single adult male on Ashcott Heath (Burton, 1964). The following year, this species was still numerous in scattered colonies on Meare Heath, especially in boggy areas with plenty of the Great Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata* L., but two of the best sites had already been destroyed: one through conversion into a rubbish tip and the other because of clearance preparatory for peat-cutting. Nevertheless, *grossum* was still plentiful on some parts of Meare Heath when I visited the locality in 1965, 1967 and 1969, but I failed to find any during a search on 24th September, 1979; it may have been too late and the weather was not propitious, but all my known sites had been destroyed by peat-cutting operations or had become too dry. Neither could I find any at my 1963 Shapwick Heath site or at Cowley's and I fear that *grossum* is close to extinction in the Central Somerset Peat Moors. However, I am glad to report that Mr. Richard Savage (*pers. comm.*) found it in small numbers on roadside verges at Catcott Heath in September, 1979 along with *Conocephalus dorsalis*. Although it is gratifying to know that *grossum* still survives in Somerset, it is clearly endangered and every effort should now be made to locate and safeguard all other remaining colonies.

Stripe-winged Grasshopper *Stenobothrus lineatus* (Panz.)

Although, when mature, this grasshopper is easily detected by its distinctive and continuous song which is quite unlike that of any other British species, it appears to have been much overlooked in Avon and North Somerset until recently. This is quite surprising as there is much apparently suitable calcareous habitat, yet I have searched for it in many likely localities without success. In fact, the

only colony I have found so far was at Woodchester Park, near Nymphsfield, Gloucestershire in 1965. However, Mr. R.S. Cropper informed Dr. D. R. Ragge in November, 1979 that he knew of seven sites from North Somerset (Vice-county 6), but had not been able to re-find it in two of them, one of which was on boggy heathland in the Peat Moors. He considered that the latter site, being such an untypical one, may have been the result of a deliberate introduction. However, such calcicolous species as the Silver-spotted Skipper butterfly *Hesperia comma*, L. have been taken in these peat moors, so the presence of *lineatus* there may be quite natural.

Woodland Grasshopper *Omocestus rufipes* (Zett.)

The only Somerset haunt of this rare and local grasshopper (although often common where it occurs) so far as I know is Great Breach Wood, near Street, at the eastern end of the Polden Hills (Vice-county 6), where I discovered it in considerable abundance on 17th August, 1971 in almost all the clearings I examined and also along the grassy margins of some of the woodlands rides. On my next visit to this locality on 6th August, 1974, however, I failed to find any at all. The glades and rides where it had flourished only three years previously were almost completely overgrown and the habitat had thus become unsuitable. I did not have time enough to visit all other parts of Great Breach Wood, so it may well survive elsewhere or perhaps in other woods in the district such as Butleigh Wood. Unfortunately, I have not been able to visit these woods at the right season since 1974. Much of Great Breach Wood is nowadays a reserve of the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation and it is to be hoped therefore that the Trust will take steps to locate and protect any surviving colonies of this nationally rare and attractive grasshopper.

There is an old record of the Woodland Grasshopper from Batheaston, near Bath (Blathwayt, 1906), but as this species has often been confused in the past with the very similar Common Green Grasshopper *Omocestus viridulus*, in the absence of any details, I believe this report should be treated with caution, although *rufipes* may well occur in the woods around Bath. An adult male in his striking black and red livery, and white palps is, however, quite unmistakable.

Incidentally, on the Continent *rufipes* is by no means confined to woodland glades and edges, being common on roadside verges, canal banks and in open country generally. Its specialized habitat in England is no doubt connected with the fact that it is on the north-western limit of its range here.

(To be continued)

THE EARLY GREY: XYLOCAMPA AREOLA ESPER IN FEBRUARY 1981. — Following a very mild January, a specimen of this moth appeared here at a lighted window on the 18th of February. — H. N. MICHAELIS, 5, Glan y Mor, Glan Conway, Denbighshire.